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Panther Sports News

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY - Charleston, IL 61920
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RUNNING BACKS

(Second in a Series)

FB OP - FB STATE -
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL.--Last year it was JAMES MARABLE (CHICAGO-SCHURZ) or DUWAYNE PITTS (DETROIT-MCKENZIE) carrying the ball in Eastern Illinois University's one back offense.

In 1987 change the 'or' to an 'and'. That's a minor switch on paper but a big one on the field as the Panthers will utilize a two back set allowing these two threats to lineup side by side.

Toss in dependable UASI LATU (THOUSAND OAKS, CA-MOORPARK CC), the back who made the most favorable impression in spring practice, and the potential exists for a much improved running game.

"Collectively, these three are better than the top three we had at Arizona State," says backfield coach Dino Babers, who was on the staff of the Rose Bowl champion Sun Devils last season.

"They'd all definitely see the field at an Arizona State but the problem here is we have three tailbacks and no fullback . . . the type of back who's 195-215, steady with that 4.7 speed.

MARABLE, a 5-9, 170 junior, stepped in last year when PITTS was injured and earned Second Team All-Gateway honors averaging 113 all-purpose yards and leading the league in scoring with 16 TDs.

Injured in the spring, MARABLE couldn't show BABERS his stuff. "I've heard some great stories about him but his trial will come in August. I know he can catch the football and has good speed, maybe even a little more straightaway speed than Pitts but he needs to work on ball security," BABERS said.

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PITTS, almost identical in size to **MARABLE** at 5-9, 175, is a senior who should earn a fourth letter. He is No. 5 on the Panthers all-time rushing list with 1806 career yards, and could wind up his career as No. 3.

What makes **PITTS** so valuable is his pass catching ability. Named the team's offensive MVP two years ago, he rushed for 968 yards in '85 but more importantly set a school record for pass receptions by a back with nine in a game and 65 in a season. He has 113 in his career.

"DuWayne is steady . . . someone you can count on day in and day out. Because of his experience he knows what he's doing. He's very elusive but I'd like him to run by people instead of stopping and juking," says **BABERS**.

With **MARABLE** and **PITTS** in the same backfield, though, the Panthers still need someone who can get one or two yards by running over people.

LATU, the No. 3 rusher last year, might be that person as he's near 200 lbs. but is only 5-10. He is a starter going into fall practice. His liability at this level is lack of experience. Last year he ran for only 174 yards on 37 carries and caught just one pass.

"He went everyday in the spring which makes him a favorite in the coaches eyes because he represents the type of player we want," said **BABERS**, who describes **LATU** as a strong runner with deceptive speed. "During the spring he was never caught from behind."

In a move designed to develop a fullback, **RAY BROWN**, a 6-1, 195 sophomore, was switched from linebacker in the spring. "He's got the size and we're hoping he can be that big back we need.

"Ray has good hands but is very raw so he'll have to get a lot of reps in order to be ready to play," says **BABERS**. "He also needs to be more aggressive and work on hanging onto the ball.

"We don't have enough backs for a two-back system but out of these four whoever can do best what we need will play."